

WSTĘP

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CULTURAL HERITAGE AS THE HERITAGE OF MEMORY

The area of Central and Eastern Europe is characterised by a remarkable concentration of various sites of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This abundance, which was created over many centuries, now still serves both those who consider themselves the successors of the former inhabitants of the area and the descendants of those who arrived there thanks to one of the waves of settlement before the 20th century or due to forced migrations after the 20th-century wars.

Over the last two centuries this part of Europe, whose elite culture was dominated by the rivalry of two German states (of the Catholic Habsburgs and the Protestant Hohenzollerns), was a virtual ethnic melting pot, in which many different cultures co-existed and influenced one another. Their memory was preserved in the objects of material and non-material culture.

Regardless of the differences in the approach, the topics of the papers collected in this volume are focused on the Central European cultural heritage understood as the heritage of memory, particularly the memory which has emerged and existed in relation with border areas. Each of the addressed issues transports us to the past in the search for material and non-material sources of this heritage. Moreover, each paper contains references to the present-day reception of the old heritage of memory, which now takes place through a different community: one that is currently responsible for this heritage.

According to the UN Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), various monuments and architectural works, secular and sacral, groups of buildings and sites “of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological, or anthropological point of view”. Whereas the UN Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) results from many years of searching, which focused on coining a definition of this elusive heritage. It is assumed that this very heritage comprises our collective memory. As much as the material culture sustains the identity of the nation, the spiritual, intangible heritage creates, shapes, and enriches it, stimulating its material expression. The intangible cultural heritage includes “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces (...) – that communities [and] groups recognize as

part of their cultural heritage.” This non-material heritage, passed from generation to generation, is constantly being recreated by communities in relation to their surroundings, environment, and history, providing them with a sense of identity and continuity.

In the conditions of undisturbed cultural development, intangible heritage contributes to the increased respect for other cultures and acceptance of diversity. The problem of Central Europe is that in the 20th century this cultural continuity was broken in many places, in particular in border areas between states. Some of the most drastic events took place after World War II in the area of Sudety and Lower Silesia, where forced migrations led to a complete exchange of population, and thus a breaking of cultural continuity.

The 2003 Convention defines not only the areas in which the intangible cultural heritage may manifest but also the notion of the “safeguarding” of the heritage itself, understood as “measures aimed at ensuring [its] viability (...), identification, documentation, research, preservation (...), transmission.” It is achieved “through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage”, always with the active participation of the local community.

The papers presented in this volume are attempts to answer the question how present-day societies employ the heritage of memory of their own and of others to construct their identities. Individual studies try to explain not only what the choice of the propagated national traditions, legends, and myths entails but also point out what, in the recent past, determined the destruction or rebuilding of monuments, reconstruction of non-existent sites, or condemning them to oblivion. There is also a separate place devoted to the heritage which was for many years unwanted, such as the castles of the Prussian nobility and sites of fortification architecture in the former Habsburg–Prussian borderlands. This category also includes the highly controversial post-totalitarian heritage of Communism and Nazism, which for many years were treated as regional “white spots”.

The Central European cultural heritage should be seen through the lens of both the aforementioned conventions. The latter, devoted to the protection of the intangible cultural heritage, is gaining in importance as it influences how we understand and treat the material cultural heritage.

The authors of the papers seek the answer to the question about the shape of the relationship between the tangible and intangible heritage in Central Europe, what measures are taken to preserve the intangible cultural heritage with the

participation of local communities, as the 2003 Convention requires. The authors point out how the cultural heritage may be conducive to the participation of local communities and contribute to developing their creativity. In this volume we can also find examples of international Polish–Czech and Polish–German initiatives, even Polish–Norwegian ones, as well as of the possibility of (micro)regional and international cooperation regarding common material cultural heritage. Heritage of memory is presented in the form of sites of memory, understood in the meaning given to this notion by Nora. Which is why events and phenomena appear besides historical characters, and an entirely symbolic topography emerges along with real places. The sites of memory are where collective identities and the collective imaginariusium crystallise, and the cultural heritage becomes part of the collective memory again.